

A tribute to my mother and superhero: Sarah Begum Kabori

RIZWAN CHOWDHURY

ON a quiet summer night early this week, when the world was sleeping, the nation lost a legend. Sarah Begum Kabori, the actress, politician, freedom fighter, and social worker, quietly slipped through the gates of eternity. Her millions of

is the pain of her five sons losing their mother. I am one of those unlucky five, the second eldest. That day, I too joined the nation in mourning. In my mind, I conjured up a list of images. A long list of celebrities from all over the world who passed away, prematurely, to the utter shock of their teeming fans. All of a sudden, my mother too

to comprehend the permanence of this void. The absolute irreversibility of death. The lifelong impact of this loss.

As I struggle to make sense of what has happened to us, I am overwhelmed with a plethora of emotions. To be honest, the seven stages of grief feel more like a 100 different stages. The emotions are indescribable. The realisation that we will never see her again is impossible to comprehend.

With every passing day, I began to recollect the moments of our life when we were happy and enjoying each other's company. After all, what else can you hold on to but the memories of happy times? Looking back, there were so many of those amazing moments. Our family gatherings were always full of laughter and jokes. Our mother had the ability to light up the room with her personality and her signature laugh. She knew how to live in the moment and our time together created wonderful memories to last a lifetime.

Whenever we were all together, it was magic. Every moment was precious and every conversation had substance. Her wit and intelligence were always the catalyst for every conversation. Her ideas on life, society, religion and politics were the basis of how each one of us evolved in this journey called life. Her impact on our psyche is undeniable. She was a champion of the needy, the not-so-fortunate, especially those who couldn't help themselves. We were always encouraged to engage in social work, participate in charitable endeavours and consciously make donations. A sense of social responsibility was a hallmark of her teachings and I cherish those values to this day.

She taught us the importance of hard work. She was a perfectionist herself and would push us to achieve

excellence in everything we did, from our class projects to our final grades. We had to do better if not the best. The pursuit of knowledge was imperative—a point she constantly impressed upon us. Whatever we have achieved, we have done so because of the drive and passion she instilled in us.

The only time we knew that our mother was a celebrity was when we went outdoors with her, especially in the seventies. The crowds were huge! And we were constantly overwhelmed. On one such occasion, I was frustrated with the situation when our car was surrounded by literally hundreds of fans. The car could barely move. I remember that moment vividly, her waving at the crowds with that million-watt smile and the crowd just soaking it in. In an instant, she transformed from being the sweet, attentive mother into a national superstar. I realised then how wonderfully she balanced both worlds. She was not just my mother—she was truly my superhero!

Throughout our childhood, she would always ensure that we were grounded. The trappings of stardom were never a reality to be taken for granted. For us, life was as normal as that of the other kids next door. No fancy cars, no crazy lifestyles, no excessive indulgence in anything whatsoever. I recall that whenever we had star-studded parties in the house, we were allowed to be up until a certain time, have dinner, and off to bed we went. My mother's co-stars, who happened to be the superstars of the day, were just another set of "Uncles" and "Aunties".

In essence, she was just our mother, albeit one with many amazing talents. During our childhood, she would stress the fact that she was always there for

us. I can remember how many times she would work around her packed schedule to take care of us when we were sick or needed her to be home. She managed to balance between work and motherhood at a time when such concepts were non-existent. This made us realise and respect the role of women in society from a very early age.

And then, there was the unconditional love and affection of a mother whose life was dedicated not just to her craft and her nation but also to her children and their individual needs. In spite of her immensely busy schedule, she made it a point to come to our school plays, take us to our sports events, cook us our favourite dishes, go shopping for our clothes and be back home whenever she could to kiss us goodnight. I can vividly see her holding my hand and looking into my eyes with that saintly smile, and saying how much she loved me. That was my mother, not the superstar, not the icon, just a loving mother who could give up her life for her greatest love, the love for her children. She made sure each one of us knew this. All five of us. That we all had a special place in her heart. She promised me a long time ago that even though life was temporal, love was not. She said love would transcend the boundaries of this life, for love was eternal.

I will never forget that. Many memories will wither away over time but I will never forget her love for all of us. The time she gave us was precious and the love she shared was the greatest gift a mother could give her children. Thank you Mom for your patience, your guidance and, most of all, your eternal love.

Rizwan Chowdhury is the second son of Sarah Begum Kabori, an iconic actress of Bangla cinema and former Member of Parliament who passed away on April 17, 2021.



Sarah Begum Kabori (centre) with her first two sons, Anjan (right) and Monty, at a family gathering.

COURTESY: AUTHOR

fans were heartbroken and an entire generation lost an icon to the senseless ravages of a virulent virus. Even the legend had to say farewell and the pandemic was her final curtain call. But what the world will never see

was part of that list. But when the noise settles, and the media has moved on to other stories, we will still be in disbelief that our mother, the towering matriarch of our family, was abruptly taken away from us. We will struggle

Let's not get confused over nature-based solutions



THE United Nations declared 2021-2030 as the "Decade on Ecosystem Restoration". Such declarations bring us both good news and bad. First, the

bad news: the nature is really in a very bad shape, which is why the UN had to dedicate a whole decade to raising awareness and taking actions to make it better. The good news is, we are at least recognising ecosystem degradation as a global crisis. And, we may expect some concrete local, national, and global initiatives to restore the health of our ailing ecosystems.

The problem with our approach to biodiversity loss and ecosystem destruction is that we understand the crisis, but do not do much about it. It may seem that the issue of biodiversity conservation has been pushed aside over the last year or so due to the pandemic. But it is not true. The UN's efforts to save the world's biodiversity, through its Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), have failed repeatedly. Our progress in respect of the "2010 Biodiversity Targets" (2002-2010), "Decade on Biodiversity" (2011-2020), and the "2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets" is not something to be proud of. Over the last 50 years, for example, the world has lost 35 percent of its wetlands and about 70 percent of mammals, birds and fish populations. Now, one in every eight plant and animal species are counting days to become extinct over the next few decades.

Despite such a gloomy situation, we have something to look forward to. Over the last couple of years, we have been learning about a relatively new

concept called nature-based solutions (NbS). It is basically bringing together all the good things we can do with our ecosystems—by protecting them, sustainably using their resources, restoring them when they get damaged, and creating new ecosystems where possible. But the best part is, while doing all of these, we not only get benefited socially and financially, but our biodiversity and ecosystem functions get benefited as well. That's why this concept has been increasingly in the climate change and biodiversity conversations in recent years.

Nevertheless, there is some confusion about what can be, or cannot be, called an NbS, which needs to be clarified. But first, let us look into some examples.

Protection of the Sundarbans or Lawachara National Park in Sreemangal is an NbS as it protects us from storms, supports our livelihoods, offers us recreation, and gives shelter to a magnificent diversity of plants and animals—small or big, slow or fast. Restoration of the Balu River of Dhaka as well as that of hijal-karoch bag (swamp forests) in the haor wetlands of greater Sylhet are also two such initiatives as these improve both human and biodiversity wellbeing. Restoration of urban wetlands and canals to pass rainwater, as we did with Hatirjeel in Dhaka, also gives us multiple benefits by allowing water transportation, increasing recreational space, and of course, improving biodiversity. Green roofs and tidal parks with sufficient plant diversity are examples of urban NbS practiced around the world.

Sustainable management of wetlands like Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj is another example, as it supports community development and biodiversity improvement. Creation of new green spaces or green parks with a healthy plant diversity in our towns and cities is also an NbS, as is the creation

of a coastal green belt with mangrove plants along Bangladesh's shoreline over the last 55 years.

Our conventional, production-centric crop agriculture and aquaculture are vital natural resource management practices, but they are not nature-based solutions. These give us food and economic security, but not biodiversity benefits. But if indigenous crop varieties are cultivated enhancing the agro-diversity of a region, or a farming system uses ecosystem processes and improves soil health and biodiversity, these may match the definition of such solutions. Similarly, Bangladesh's traditional water hyacinth-based floating agriculture is an NbS as it controls invasive species, like water hyacinth, facilitates aquatic biodiversity, and reduces use of chemicals in agriculture.

It has been suggested that planting a trillion trees on a billion hectares of land all over the world could remove a significant amount of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and make the Earth cooler. Studies have shown that biodiversity-rich forests can store two times more carbon than single-species plantations. Despite that, if we go for monoculture plantations, it cannot be called an NbS. Because, it is not supporting any net biodiversity gain—a core feature of such a solution.

Bangladesh has around 50 small to large protected areas including two marine ones—Swatch of No Ground and Nijhum Dwip. The declaration and management of all these areas could be called NbS, provided they give benefits to both people and biodiversity. But if we are not sure what societal problems these protected areas are addressing, if they are not large enough to create a significant impact, if ecosystem integrity is not ensured, and if the local people are not made part of the planning, management and benefit sharing, then

these cannot be called nature-based solutions.

We often see conservation projects intended to save a particular wildlife species, such as dolphin, elephant, tiger, turtle, or vulture. These often include population surveys, awareness campaigns, habitat protection, ensuring



food availability, captive breeding, and enforcing laws to stop illegal wildlife trade. If such interventions do not offer wider ecosystem and human benefits, these can be called species conservation initiatives, but not NbS.

In recent decades, we have had many good practices aimed at making the world a better place, for example, by switching from single-use plastic products to natural alternatives. The use and reuse of jute, cotton or paper bags instead of plastic bags, cloth masks instead of surgical masks, bamboo straws instead of plastic straws, and dried-leave plates instead of plastic

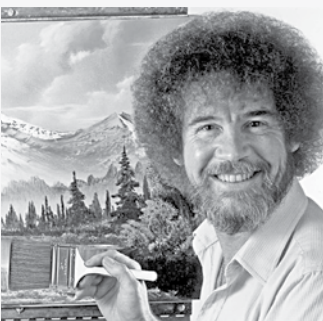
plates are commendable environment-friendly practices. But these should not be called nature-based solutions just because these are using natural products—because there are no direct biodiversity or ecosystem benefits involved.

As we start the UN Decade on

'The problem with our approach to biodiversity loss and ecosystem destruction is that we understand the crisis, but do not do much about it.'

PHOTO: PHILIP GAIN

QUOTABLE Quote



BOB ROSS
American Painter
(1942-1995)

It's so important to do something every day that will make you happy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

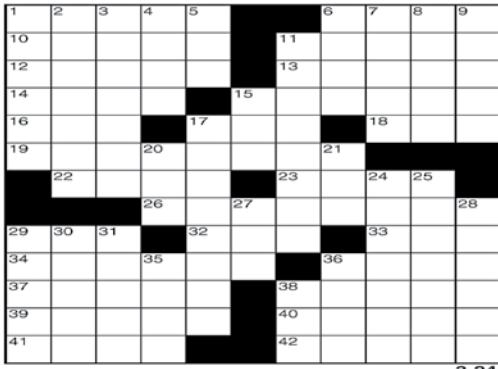
ACROSS

- 1 Movie genre
- 6 Accomplishment
- 10 Gin mixer
- 11 Ham's need
- 12 Stood up
- 13 Keats, for one
- 14 Humorist Sahl
- 15 Rook's shape
- 16 Conclude
- 17 Sleep spot
- 18 Dress line
- 19 Superfluous
- 22 Pine or palm
- 23 "Othello" villain
- 26 Critics, at times
- 29 Yr. parts
- 32 Fabric color
- 33 Badminton need
- 34 Make cryptograms

Down

- 1 Flower part
- 2 Tiara's kin
- 3 From start to finish
- 4 Boxing weapon
- 5 Bar rocks
- 6 Crazes
- 7 Singer Piaf
- 8 Usher's place

- 9 Clan symbol
- 11 Site of some diners
- 15 Bee follower
- 17 Take for every penny
- 20 Bear lair
- 21 Mule of old song
- 24 Nonbrand
- 25 Pizzeria herb
- 27 Retina setting
- 28 Declares
- 29 Monument
- 30 When expected
- 31 "Rob Roy" writer
- 35 For us
- 36 Like bucks
- 38 Topper



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



BETTER BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.